

ADDRESS BY SHRI BALMIKI PRASAD SINGH
HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR OF SIKKIM

I am happy to be here in the august company of our beloved spiritual leader, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, to inaugurate and participate in the international conference on *Science, Spirituality and Education*. It is, indeed, heartening to see so many persons of eminence in the field of education and spiritual knowledge present here this morning. Personally, I consider it a great privilege and a blessing to be able to welcome His Holiness to this sacred land of Guru Padmasambhava and for His willingness to share his vast spiritual knowledge in this conference. I join the organizers in warmly welcoming each one of you. I am in no doubt that this three day conference on *Science, Spirituality and Education* will come out with concrete recommendations to connect the three important subjects to the benefit of mankind.

I congratulate the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT) for selecting the theme of *Science, Spirituality and Education* for the conference and for making it possible for confluence of thought processes on the three subjects which are interlinked in myriad ways.

It is true that scientists and spiritual masters have pursued separate paths to better their own field of study and experience. While growth and development of science have immensely benefitted mankind materially and in raising standard of living, spiritual knowledge and experience remained as the preserve of few masters and their disciples. But one must appreciate that Spirituality is the other name for Moral Science and without the base of Moral Science, science per say can usher in disastrous consequences both to nature and human beings.

At this day and age of breathtaking scientific and technological advancement and development, the world is becoming a dangerous place to live. The kinds of lethal weapons we have manufactured have given us a sense of invincibility, without realizing their destructive potential. High demands for consumerism and materialism have increased the risk of global warming and pollution. It seems man in his quest to progress in all fronts looks to conquer nature. But it is only when we are faced with the natural disasters that we realize how small and powerless we are.

Our priority, therefore, should be to first save our planet and the species inhabiting it from our greed and ravages of nature.

By nature we all yearn for lasting peace and prosperity but by action we sometimes work against it. If scientific advancement alone was a recipe for peace, then today the rich and developed nations should have no socio-economic problems but we all know this is not the case.

Today's complex lifestyle also takes a toll on both physical and mental well-being. In our quest to keep up with the rest we tend to over exert ourselves. This leaves the mind stressed and body exhausted. Spiritual knowledge can help us relax and appreciate life. It would also make us have love and compassion for others. Spiritual knowledge and experience, therefore, enrich our mind to appreciate life in its many folds and restrains us to act in a manner that would not endanger the life of other species.

Fortunately, in recent times spiritual masters and learned *gurus* are writing books on the subject of spiritualism and also imparting teachings at various forums. As a result more and more people are learning to appreciate and turn to spiritual pursuits while enjoying the progress of scientific and technological innovations. It is being increasingly realized that the world will be a better place to live in if we combine the knowledge of science and spiritualism and propagate that knowledge through education and awareness.

Time has come to educate the young minds about spiritualism. Spiritual education may not necessarily be based on a particular religion. The main focus should be to make the future leaders and policy makers compassionate and tolerant, irrespective of caste, creed, nationality or religion. Challenge before us is how to bring about this transformation in the present education system.

The educational system must evolve to meet the daunting challenges of the 21st century. It must nurture the heart as well as the mind to lay the foundation for compassion so that every individual utilizes his skills and abilities not only for personal growth and advancement but also for the good of the world.

In discussing interface between science, spirituality and education, there is a need for emphasizing the importance of a rational approach. Lord Buddha's prescriptions in this respect are greatly relevant. Buddha attached greater importance to rational enquiry than perhaps any other religious leader in history. The Buddha says in a sutra: "Monks and scholars should well analyse my words, like gold [to be tested through] melting, cutting and polishing, and then adopt them, but not for the sake of showing me respect." By this Buddha meant that even if a particular doctrine is set forth in scriptures, one must examine

whether or not it meets the test of reasoning, if it conflicts with reasoning, or is at variance with new realities, it is no longer appropriate to assert its primacy and follow its dictates. This applies to Buddha's sayings as well.

Religion has played a great role in building up of human beings and society. But in an age of science we cannot be called upon to accept incredible dogmas. Towards this, scholars need to reflect and bring to public notice stands taken in a scripture which have been scientifically proved as no longer valid. This approach may also apply to gender biases and caste and community prejudices.

A fundamental change in attitude is necessary. When we investigate certain descriptions as they exist in sacred texts and find that they do not correspond to reality, then we must accept the reality, and not the literal scriptural explanation.

The challenges of an inter-dependent world demand a new vision. It is high time for scientists, educators and spiritual masters to come together to plan how contemplative practices can be adapted in the class rooms by means of an inter-disciplinary approach that includes expertise in education practices, applied and basic sciences, and the wisdom of life.

The general impression that the spirit of science is opposed to that of spirituality is both unfortunate and untrue. The basis of both science and spirituality is to construct a reasoned argument of nature and way of life.

It also needs to be appreciated that a knowledge-based world is an open world. When we talk of the fusion of science and spirituality, we are not putting any limitations on the autonomy of either scientific or spiritual endeavours. Any limitation on the objectivity and autonomy of science and any prescription for a singular path of spirituality would come in the way of progress and peace and thus could not be beneficial for the development of a harmonious world. The need is to work for the development of a more cohesive and inclusive world view in which science and spirituality are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

There are people who fear that an emphasis on values in education would push us back to an ancient era. These fears are unfounded. What is true is that religion and spirituality were developed by our ancestors much more than science. What characterizes the past century as well as the present is the phenomenal progress in science. The task of linking spirituality and values with present day developments in science and technology is essential for building a global peaceful order. For it is only through spirituality that the forces of greed, hatred, and

despondency can be overcome. The world's great civilizational traditions provide us wisdom which promotes peace of mind and cultivation of qualities such as compassion and tolerance.

Education is a transformative experience. For good education we need good teachers. It is the duty of teachers to ensure that educational institutions become centres, both for attaining proficiency in science and the arts and also for the cultivation and enrichment of self-discipline and social and moral values. Rabindranath Tagore put it aptly when he said, "A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame." May this conference help promote multiplication of these lamps.

The moot question is: can we combine the progress of science and technology with the progress of mind and spirit? We have to embrace science and technology for they represent the basic facts of life today. At the same time, we cannot be untrue to values of compassion and tolerance. Industrial progress and market economy need not lead to negation of our civilizational strengths.

Science will triumph over ignorance and superstitions. Similarly, spirituality will prevail upon selfishness and fear. And it is only through the instrumentality of education that people and through them nation-states can be empowered to build a great future for humanity.

In the context of these perspectives, this seminar becomes important to discuss how science and spiritualism can be interwoven to bring compassion in the mind of people and promote sustainable development in the interest of saving the earth from man-made catastrophe. Education can play a significant role in propagating the knowledge of science and spiritualism in the mind of future leaders.

We have all assembled here to hear His Holiness - The living Buddha of our times, on this important theme. I warmly and most respectfully invite him to address and guide us.